

Section I. AREA DESCRIPTION

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Introduction

This report presents an updated plan for the revitalization of the commercial core in Essex, Maryland, the linear two-block core area along Eastern Avenue (four discrete city blocks, plus adjacent strips), which is the Central Business District (CBD) of Essex. The study also includes retail and non-retail uses in an extended target area adjacent to the CBD. This plan is oriented toward providing a broad, updated strategy that can guide the Essex Development Corporation (EDCO) and Baltimore County in their revitalization program for Essex, plus recommendation of the specific steps that should be executed to successfully complete the commercial revitalization project now underway. In this context, new uses or improvements to certain key sites are suggested. The nature of this strategy is described below, under the heading of Study Objectives, followed by an outline of the report.

Study Objectives

Several planning studies and market analyses have been prepared for Essex since 1976; (these are described later in Section I) These studies have provided the basis for eight years of revitalization activity and projects in the Essex commercial core. These activities and projects have sought to improve the physical condition and functioning of public infrastructure, to upgrade the appearance and condition of public spaces and private buildings, and to increase the general activity level in the

CBD through expanded government offices and public facilities, in an effort to rejuvenate commercial activity the area.

At this point it is timely to re-evaluate the strategy that has guided revitalization planning in Essex, given the completion of many of the projects that have been recommended in the past, and given that certain changes that have occurred in the CBD and in the regional marketplace that may warrant revisions to that revitalization strategy. Consequently, the revitalization planning effort reported here has been undertaken to accomplish four objectives:

- o First, to assess current commercial activity in the CBD and market conditions in the trading area served by businesses in Essex, and to determine future market potentials that should emerge within this trading area over the next five to ten years (the market study);
- o Second, to determine the present status and degree of success of revitalization activities proposed for the CBD in previous revitalization plans, as Phase I of the Essex Development Corporation (EDCO) revitalization program;
- o Third, to re-evaluate the conceptual framework underlying Phase I activities and to update these concepts for the role and function of the CBD to reflect current market conditions, completed projects, and planning realities; and
- o Fourth, to recommend the strategic next steps to be taken in Phase II to complete the revitalization of the extended Essex core area according to these revised concepts for the role and function of the CBD. A future phase, Phase III, will extend the physical boundaries of the study area still further.

Study Outline

This report consists of two sections, the "Revitalization Strategy" and a "Technical Appendix". The Revitalization Strategy (this report)

consists of an introductory section describing the study objectives, the study area, and summaries of physical and business conditions in Essex, plus potentials for revitalization (Section I); previous planning and revitalization activities (Section II); a revised revitalization concept (Section III); and recommendations for an updated revitalization strategy for Essex (Section IV).

The "Technical Appendix" consists of a detailed inventory of building structural conditions, and commercial floor space, parking facilities, and an in-depth retail market analysis. The Revitalization Strategy report should serve the needs of policy-makers, while the Technical Appendix will be available for reference.